

MESOPOTAMIAN MINUTE

- Current News on Agriculture & USDA in Iraq -
Office of Agricultural Affairs, U.S. Embassy, Baghdad

Sunday, September 26, 2010

USDA Seed Expert Visits Iraq – USDA/Agricultural Marketing Service seed expert, Perry Bohn, met with Iraqi government officials including Ministry of Agriculture leadership, the Prime Minister's Agricultural Advisor, representatives of the Iraqi Seed Traders Association, as well as representatives of the FAO. Mr. Bohn discussed the OECD's seed certification system, seed registration issues in Iraq and reforms expected with the implementation of Iraq's new seed law. Mr. Bohn's visit, Sept. 21-26, is part of FAS Baghdad's efforts to make improved seed varieties available to Iraqi producers.



Perry Bohn presents the OECD program to the Iraqi seed traders

Coals to Newcastle?: Iraqis Study U.S. Date Production – A team of 12 Iraqis is wrapping up a visit to California to learn about U.S. date production, processing and marketing. Into the 1980s, Iraq was the world's leading date exporter but is now struggling to revive local production and get back into the international marketplace. The visit was spearheaded by Basra PRT Advisor, Sean Currans.

Master's Degree Candidates Identified for USDA's Version of the Fulbright – This past week, USDA staff interviewed 17 finalists for its agricultural economics graduate degree program. Of this group, up to 10 Iraqis will be nominated for participation which begins with English immersion at participating U.S. land grant universities in January 2011. FAS/W is finalizing the list of U.S. universities the Iraqis will attend to work on their masters' degrees in agricultural economics/agribusiness.

Iraq National 4-H Board of Directors Meeting – Representatives from Anbar and Baghdad province 4-H clubs met to discuss ongoing work, taking the organization national, voted on the national chairman, recommended including two new members to the board (one from the Ministry of Youth and one from the Ministry of Agriculture) and proposed a youth exchange trip to the U.S. in late March/early April. Baghdad PRT Advisor, Mary Kerstetter, has led efforts to broaden 4-H in Iraq. In addition, Mary obtained and arranged for the donation of 15 used computers to Iraq's 4-H.



Some Iraq National 4-H Board of Director's meeting attendees

USDA Agricultural Advisor Conference – FAS Baghdad is hosting a meeting of 15 of its PRT Agricultural Advisors September 27 -28. USDA/W's Iraq and Afghanistan program coordinators from Washington will also attend the conference and meet with Agricultural Advisors. Topics of interest include: best practices, brainstorming with Ministry of Agriculture (afternoon of the 27th), coordination among stakeholders, and project sustainability with the impending PRT drawdown.

Personnel Update- There are currently 34 USDA personnel in Iraq including those with Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), at Embassy Baghdad or embedded with U.S. military units. We welcome Alex Miller headed to PRT Anbar and Bill Tierney who will serve at PRT Kirkuk.